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## Bright Hopes, Then Gloom

# Cuba Rebel's Diary: The Invaders Land

*The following story by a survivor of the abortive Cuban invasion tells of his embarkation from Nicaragua and the battle on a Cuban beachhead.*

By Manuel Penabaz

Written for United Press International

MIAMI, May 4.—April 11, 1961, Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua—

I am writing this aboard our ship, the Atlantico of the Garcia Lines, a Cuban company. It is a floating scrap heap, a resurrected Liberty ship that looks like it may be making its last voyage. Suddenly the lifeless decks of the ship have been covered by sleeping bags, with men clutching Garands and machine guns and mortars, and echoing to obscenities and curses.

### Went to Nicaragua

The scenes of the past few hours flicker through my mind like a moving picture. When we left Retalhuleu (Guatemala) in seven transport planes this morning, none suspected that our destination was Nicaragua. Our group was made up of the Third Battalion, heavy mortars and chiefs of staff. All of us were bound for this ship, the Atlantico.

Five other ships in our flotilla can be seen scattered around the bay. It gives me a sensation of security to see these ships, knowing that there are hundreds of other men, ready as we are, to attack; knowing that never before in Latin America has an invasion force such as this been assembled. They say that aboard some of the ships are five modern tanks, aviation

gasoline, bombs, guns—and the best trained force in Latin America. I feel sure of our victory. Besides, God is with us. We will win.

April 13—We are still waiting. Twice we have left port and sailed to the open sea, only to return at night to load more munitions and material.

### Toward Destiny

April 14—The flotilla is steaming toward our date with destiny. Our ships are in single file. Two destroyers—I think they are North American—flank us. The sensation is of an authentic war convoy. All the ships are blacked out tonight and smoking has been forbidden since we left Puerto Cabezas two days ago, and since we are a floating powder keg, not even the ship's kitchens are operating and our meals are all cold.

Today, Jose San Roman called us to the officers' mess and briefed the staff on our plan of attack. All of us were surprised that the Bay of Pigs had been selected for the landing—it was the first any of us had heard about it. I personally thought we were going to land at Pinar del Rio. None-the-less, after listening to the details of the plan, I thought it was perfect. San Roman also told us that we were going to destroy the airports at Rancho Boyeros, San Antonio de los Banos, Campo Libertad, Managua, San Julian, Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, Santa Clara, Cienfuegos and Batabano—the last two the day we actually hit the beaches.

We were told that the under-

ground was to destroy the bridges and declare a general strike throughout the island. We were told we would have an air umbrella over us at all times so as to guarantee that the sky would always be ours.

April 17—We are entrenched on Cuban soil, and here we will stay. All our men now are on Cuban soil, with all their equipment, part of our provisions, munitions and arms. In less than twenty-four hours, we have already driven forty-two kilometers (twenty-six miles) inland. In the first clashes the enemy suffered heavy casualties and retreated without resistance.

### On Red Beach

The first to engage the enemy were the 180 men of Battalion 2 under command of Eneido Oliva, the most all-around officer in our force. Reinforced by 5mm. cannons and 50 mm. machine guns and a 4.2 mortar from the heavy weapons battalion, they engaged a militia force of fifteen or twenty trucks and six tanks—including Stalin tanks—a few hours after landing on Red Beach (the rebel designation for a sector of Giron Beach).

Though the enemy force consisted of several thousand men, they were completely routed and we captured intact two tanks without any resistance—the militiamen apparently were simply frightened by our onslaught.

When we found we did not know how to drive the tanks, we had to burn them on the spot. Reports are streaming in to our command post on Blue Beach and all the reports are encouraging—the enemy is disorganized and putting up a ridiculous resistance. Spirits are high in the command post.

### Cuban Planes Busy

April 18—Early today Battalion 2 pulled back to Blue Beach to consolidate our forces, al-



Associated Press wirephoto

renton yesterday.

## Negro

(Continued from page one)

Brandis jr., dean of the school.

our men in the command post and injured another, named Morin.

### Stalin Tanks Used

News reaches us of a battle in a town called San Blas, eighteen kilometers (eleven miles) inland. The front was defended by airborne troops and the armored battalion. Four of the